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ABSTRACT

Since revision is an integral part of writing instruction, a study explored the value that students attach to guided revision of their speaking outlines prior to presenting the speech. Subjects, 140 students taught by five different instructors, both ranked and rated the helpfulness of 10 instructional approaches in improving their public speaking skills. Instructor feedback to a detailed, preliminary outline (returned to the student with sufficient time to revise before presenting the speech) and instructor feedback on the speech itself were the most highly rated instructional approaches, with instructor suggestions for revising the outline ranked as the single most helpful instructional approach. Findings suggest the need to train inexperienced instructors in effective means of providing feedback. Contains 9 references. Appended are a list of instructional approaches for rating and ranking and a table of data. (Author/NKA)

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The Importance of Instructor-Guided Revision in a Public Speaking Course

by

Ruth Anne Clark

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The Importance of Instructor-Guided Revision in a Public Speaking Class

Since revision is an integral part of writing instruction, this study explored the value that students attach to guided revision of their speaking outlines prior to presenting the speech. One hundred forty students, taught by five different instructors, both ranked and rated the helpfulness of ten instructional approaches in improving their public speaking skills. Instructor feedback to a detailed, preliminary outline (returned to the student with sufficient time to revise before presenting the speech) and instructor feedback on the speech itself were the most highly rated instructional approaches, with instructor suggestions for revising the outline ranked as the single most helpful instructional approach. ***Keywords:*** *revision, instructor feedback, speech composition, outlines*

The Importance of Instructor-Guided Revision in a Public Speaking Course

In the teaching of writing skills, instructor-guided revision has a long standing tradition as an integral component of instruction. David Foster, in *A Primer for Writing Teachers*, identifies selecting the balance between impromptu and planned (with revision) writing as one of the six key questions for designing a course in writing. Although some argue that impromptu writing is preferable to crafting planned compositions for honing writing skills, writing instructors generally endorse the position that "revision is a major aspect of the writing process" (Ziv, 1984, p. 363). As Foster (1992) puts it, "The emphasis upon composing and revision now appears as a matter of course in writing texts" (p. 180). In fact, for writing instructors, the question is not *whether* to offer guidance for revision, but rather *what kind* of guidance should be provided. Fathman and Whalley (1990) note that instructors in second language writing frequently ask themselves, "How can I give the best feedback to help my students improve their compositions?" (p. 178). In fact, entire books are devoted to training writing instructors in giving effective feedback on student work (See, e.g., Lanham, 1987).

Since the teaching of written and oral communication skills share many commonalities and are sometimes taught within the same course, it is remarkable that so little attention is given to revision, or for that matter, to instructor feedback more generally in the development of oral skills. The comprehensive review by Staton-Spicer and Wulff (1984) of all research in "communication and instruction" published in the journals of our national association (then the Speech Communication Association) from 1974 to 1982 yielded surprisingly little work devoted to instructor feedback. Since 1982, *Communication Education*, the journal of the National

Communication Association concerned with research in instructional issues, contains no recent research on instructor feedback.

There are good reasons why instructor-guided revision is not the integral part of the development of oral skills that it is of written ones. Since student presentations consume a great deal of class time, requiring revisions would necessarily restrict the number of different assignments that could be incorporated within a course, and there is value to giving students the opportunity to present speeches that serve a variety of functions. Moreover, both instructors and students want to keep the class interesting, and listening to revisions of earlier presentations quite likely is less engaging than hearing a piece of original work. No doubt some public speaking courses contain assignments involving revision, but many do not.

Yet it is possible to incorporate some instructor-guided revision in a public speaking course without consuming additional class time--simply by providing students with instructor feedback on a detailed outline. The purpose of the present study was to assess how valuable students find such feedback. The course in which this study was conducted is a multi-section (more than 50 sections per term) course taught primarily by teaching assistants at a large Midwestern university. Following a self-presentation speech, students give five presentations. For each of these, students are required to submit a detailed (complete with all supporting materials) preliminary outline which the students consider to be sufficiently polished to present to the class. Instructors offer detailed feedback on these outlines and return them to students with adequate time for the students to revise the outline before rehearsing the actual presentation. Grades on the preliminary outline constitute 20 percent of the final grade, with grades on the speeches contributing the other 80 percent. The specific research question posed in this study

focused on the value students place on the feedback offered as a basis for revision of the outline:

R1: How important do students consider instructor feedback on their preliminary outline?

Method

To lend generalizability to the results, students taught by five different instructors were used as participants. Evaluations of the effectiveness of teaching approaches in improving students' effectiveness in public speaking skills were obtained late in the course in order for students to have had ample time to determine what features of instruction had been most helpful.

Participants

Students enrolled in seven sections of a basic public speaking course were invited to participate. A total of 140 (60 males, 78 females, 2 undesignated) completed the instrument. Of these, 63 were freshmen, 43 sophomores, 19 juniors, and 13 seniors.

Instrument

Students were reminded that the primary goal of the course is to improve their skills in public speaking. They were presented with a list of 10 instructional approaches (see Appendix) used in the course and were asked first to rank order the approaches in terms of their effectiveness in helping to improve public speaking skills, with the most helpful to be designated as "1". Next, students were asked to rate each of the 10 approaches in terms of its helpfulness. A rating of five indicated almost always helpful, four signified helpful most of the time, three represented helpful some of the time, two indicated helpful once in a while, and one reflected not very helpful.

Analysis

The ranking data were analyzed by a Friedman nonparametric test for k dependent means. Subsequently, each pair of rankings was compared using a Wilcoxon signed ranks test. Since a

total of 45 paired comparisons were conducted, the significance level (.05) was divided by 45 to control for potential inflation of significant results. The rating data were analyzed with a multivariate analysis of variance. A Bonferroni correction was employed to protect against inflation of significant results when comparing pairs of means.

Results

The mean rankings of the ten instructional approaches correlated -.975 with the mean ratings of the same approaches. The correlation was negative since a high rating corresponded to being very helpful whereas a low ranking corresponded to most helpful. The markedly close correspondence of the two sets of measures suggests a high degree of reliability and validity, since alternative methods of measurement yielded highly similar results (Campbell & Fiske, 1985).

Rankings

The Friedman test yielded a highly significant difference for the rankings: chi square ($df = 9) = 336.281$, $p < .001$. Comparisons of each set of ranks indicated that feedback on the preliminary outline was ranked significantly more helpful than any other instructional approach, with a mean rank of 2.79. The two approaches ranked next most helpful were feedback on speeches (mean rank of 3.67) and sample outlines (mean rank of 3.99). A cluster of five approaches was ranked somewhat lower in helpfulness (mean ranks ranging from 5.19 to 6.41): listening to classmates' speeches and hearing them discussed, reading how to prepare each speech, listening to lecture related to speech preparation, viewing a video tape of one of their own speech, viewing video taped models of each type of speech. Two instructional approaches were ranked significantly less helpful than all others: classmates' comments on the student's speech had a mean rank of 7.43, and classroom activities' mean rank was 7.74.

Ratings

The multivariate analysis of variance yielded a highly significant effect for approach to instruction on the ratings: Wilks' Lambda $(df = 9, 119) = 63.040, p < .001$. Comparisons of each pair of means revealed that two approaches were rated significantly higher than all others: feedback on preliminary outlines had a mean rating of 4.56, and feedback on speeches was rated 4.45. Beyond the two forms of feedback, sample outlines were rated significantly higher than the remaining instructional approaches, with a mean rating of 3.94. A cluster of four instructional approaches received the next highest ratings (ranging from 3.44 to 3.29). These included watching classmate's speeches and hearing them discussed, reading how to prepare each speech, viewing a video tape of one of their own speeches, and listening to a lecture on how to prepare each speech. A group of three instructional approaches were rated least effective (with means ranging from 2.89 to 2.51): viewing video tapes of model speeches, receiving comments from classmates regarding the student's own speech, and classroom activities.

Discussion

This project provides strong evidence for the value students attach to instructor feedback designed to help them revise their speaking outlines prior to the actual presentation of the speech. Instructor feedback on the preliminary outline and the speech itself were rated significantly higher than the other instructional approaches, and when asked to indicate the single most helpful instructional approach for improving public speaking skills, students identified suggestions for revision of the preliminary outline as the most helpful form of instruction they received.

One might argue that instructor feedback was highly valued only because other forms of instruction were poorly executed. This seems unlikely, however, since end-of-term evaluations of

the sections of the course involved in the study revealed high course evaluations (an average overall rating of more than four on a five-point scale) for both the course and the instructor. Consequently, the high ratings and rankings for instructor suggestions for modifying the preliminary outline do not appear to be an artifact of poor quality of other features of instruction.

The results of this study offer two important implications for instructional development. First, providing students with instructor feedback on a preliminary draft of their speaking outline and encouraging them to revise the outline appears to be a valuable instructional tool. It is not surprising that students appreciate individuated feedback, since such feedback has been demonstrated to enhance student performance across a wide range of student performance: writing (Dorrow & Boyle, 1998; Lackey, 1997), physical skills (Silverman, 1992), and learning and study strategies (Haught, Hill, Walls, & Nardi, 1988).

In addition to the importance of incorporating revision in the public speaking course, the present project also suggests the need to train inexperienced instructors in effective means of providing feedback. In the particular public speaking course in which this study was conducted, first-year instructors are given systematic training in critiquing outlines. Novice instructors are asked to critique outlines (and speeches) and then provided copies of the feedback generated by successful, experienced instructors as models to compare with their own feedback. This process is repeated until the novice instructors acquire adequate skill in crafting useful feedback. As noted earlier, the field of writing instruction has devoted sustained, systematic attention to the skill of providing helpful feedback. The field of oral communication instruction should do no less.

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Appendix

Instructional Approaches for Rating and Ranking

Preliminary outline feedback. Instructors write comments on the outline and provide a summary of suggestions for revision at the end of the outline.

Speech feedback. Following completion of the speaking assignment, students receive a detailed written evaluation of their performance from the instructor.

Sample outlines. The course manual includes at least three exemplary outlines for each assignment that demonstrate the kind of outline the students are expected to construct.

Classmates' speeches. Students hear the performances of their peers.

Reading on preparation. The course manual contains detailed instructions for preparing each speaking assignment.

Lecture on preparation. The instructor offers detailed instruction for preparing each assignment.

Viewing own video. For one assignment, students' speeches are video taped so that they may view them and write a self critique.

Viewing model speeches. For each speaking assignment, students see video tapes of one or two exemplary speeches, which are followed by comments from their instructor.

Comments from classmates. Following each speaking performance, students receive oral reactions from their classmates.

Class activities. A number of activities, including impromptu speeches and exercises focusing on specific skills, are interspersed throughout the term.

Table 1

Mean Ranks and Ratings of the Ten Instructional Approaches

Instructional Approach	Mean Rank	Mean Rating
Preliminary outline feedback	2.79	4.56a
Speech feedback	3.67	4.45
Sample outlines	3.99	3.94
Classmates' speeches	5.19	3.44
Reading on preparation	5.54	3.37
Lecture on preparation	5.71	3.27
Viewing own video	6.23	3.33
Viewing model speeches	6.41	2.89
Comments from classmates	7.43	2.83
Class activities	7.74	2.51

Note. Low scores on rankings indicate more helpful; high scores on ratings indicate more helpful. Means of rankings with same subscript are not significantly different from each other; means of ratings with same subscript are not significantly different from each other.

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